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What's New?

Union Presidents Speak on Reforming Teacher Compensation

A new report—*Leading the Local: Teachers Union Presidents Speak on Change, Challenges*—contains an entire section devoted to reforming teacher compensation. The information contained in the report, written by Susan Moore Johnson of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and published by Education Sector, was gathered through interviews with 30 teachers union presidents who represent districts in six states.

The union presidents emphasized the importance of improving teacher pay and benefits for multiple reasons, including ensuring their districts can attract and retain the best teacher talent. Many also indicated that they currently are working with their schools to pilot alternative compensation programs, including stipends, career ladders, pay incentives for hard-to-staff schools or subjects, and rewards for teachers who hold certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Overall, union presidents expressed more support for school-based awards than for individual awards. Many agreed that performance-based pay would be untenable to teachers

without districts ensuring that the appropriate indicators and outcomes were in place to support such a program. A few union presidents went a bit further and acknowledged that their districts cannot wait forever to begin to reform educator compensation programs because reform will happen with or without them.

The full report is available online: http://www.educationsector.org/usr_doc/UnionLeaders.pdf

Hot Off the Press

Black River to Pay Teachers Merit Bonuses—*Grand Rapids Press*, June 29, 2007

<http://www.mlive.com/news/grpress/index.ssf?/base/news-37/118312490752380.xml&coll=6>

Michigan's Black River Public Schools will offer merit bonuses to teachers who meet individual academic goals.

Teacher-Reward System Credited in Schools' Rise—*The Dallas Morning News*, June 25, 2007

http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/stories/DN-risdtp_25met.ART0.State.Edition1.43a91f1.html

Texas teachers in participating Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) schools are credited with student improvement on state assessments.

Struggling Schools Hope Big Pay Lures Teachers, Lifts Performance—*Palm Beach Post*, June 24, 2007

http://www.palmbeachpost.com/search/content/local_news/epaper/2007/06/24/s1c_SKRECRUITING_0624.html

Florida's Palm Beach County School District offers incentives to attract teachers to more than 250 opening positions.

Salary System Luring Faculty—*Denver Post*, June 18, 2007

http://www.denverpost.com/education/ci_6165854

ProComp, Denver's merit pay program, has fueled an increase in teacher applications for hard-to-staff positions.

Grantee Spotlight: Fort Lupton Teacher Incentive Fund

Educators in the Weld County School District in Fort Lupton, Colorado, will soon be involved in the Fort Lupton Teacher Incentive Fund (FL-TIF) project. FL-TIF will provide an incentive program to reward teachers and principals who contribute to increases in student achievement at the school and classroom levels and who offer students more opportunities for rigorous coursework. The incentive program is set to be fully operational by the second year of the grant.

Of the four schools in the district participating in the project, three have been identified as failing to make adequate yearly progress. The district has 2,565 students, the majority of which are underperforming in the following subjects: reading (45 percent proficient), writing (34 percent proficient), and mathematics (26 percent proficient). Approximately 71 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. There also are large populations of English language learners and minority students. In addition to a high number of teachers who are not highly qualified in the content areas in which they teach, Weld County School District also has low teacher retention. On average, teachers remain in the school district for less than two years.

What need is the project trying to address?

Low-achieving schools in the district cannot attract or retain highly qualified educators.

What are the goals of the project?

FL-TIF aims to attract and reward qualified teachers and principals who demonstrate the ability to raise student achievement.

How much are the financial incentives?

The incentive payments for the first year of FL-TIF will be based on the fall 2007 accreditation rating designed by the District Accountability Committee under state law. This is two-pronged system with an incentive payment based on the school's accreditation category (X) and an incentive payment based on the percentage point growth during the previous year (Y).

The fall 2007 bonus payout (based on 2006–07 school year scores) will range from \$750 (for teachers) and \$300 (for instructional paraprofessionals) at sites that are fully accredited. Staff at sites that are on academic probation or not accredited are not eligible for a bonus payout.

To determine the Y factor, each site's fall 2006 accreditation score will be compared to the fall 2007 accreditation score. Eligible staff will receive a bonus for each point that the score increases. For the fall 2007 payout, Y = \$50 for teachers and \$20 for paraprofessionals.

What are the strengths of the project?

The rationale for using the indicators in the first part of the incentive plan includes the following:

- The measures are broad and look at several different assessments.
- The system measures and rewards growth.
- The system considers the issue of achievement gaps.
- The system differentiates among the sites and the assessments they use.
- Buildings know their goals, which are predetermined in the school improvement plans.
- The system can be used for tiered awards.
- A baseline is available from 2005–06.

An evaluation plan relying on focus groups, surveys, and assessment data is already in place for FL-TIF. A research-based principal evaluation system will be developed during the first year of the incentive program. FL-TIF will make use of existing data systems and develop new systems to help teachers maintain their goals and to review teacher results and assessment data.

Feature Article: Communicating About Educator Compensation

Without support from educators and the community, efforts to design and implement an alternative

compensation system likely will be fruitless. Educator compensation reform has been successful in systems that seek and involve the input of teachers, principals, and district administrators; engage community members; and keep all stakeholders informed during the design and implementation of the system.

Effective strategic communication includes constant, clear, and consistent messages that keep internal and external stakeholders informed and involved. When designing and implementing an alternative compensation system, stakeholders should be involved in developing the processes and components of the system so that they understand the benefits and challenges entailed in creating the system. Effective communication should include strategies that consider the stakeholders' relationship to and understanding of the changes to the compensation system and how it will affect them (Community Training and Assistance Center, 2004). An effective communication plan continuously assesses messages, modes of communication, and resources to ensure that they facilitate the progress of reform.

The following seven steps provide ideas and strategies for engaging teachers in the development and implementation of new-teacher compensation systems as well as communicating information about those systems to educators and the public.

Step 1. Ask the essential question at the beginning: *What does the district or state hope to accomplish by creating a new-teacher pay system?*

Possible answers to this question may include the following:

- Reward teaching practices that lead to increased student learning.
- Attract and retain teachers in high-need schools.
- Attract teachers to high-need subject fields.
- Reshape professional development.
- Create new career structures to keep accomplished teachers from leaving the classroom.

Step 2. Assemble a representative compensation committee.

As a general rule, a representative committee at the district level should have 10–15 members and may include the following:

- Superintendent
- Teacher union or association representative(s)
- Teachers
- Principal(s)
- Other central office personnel
- School board member
- Other community representatives

Step 3. Decide who should lead the committee.

The leader of the compensation committee is symbolically important and should be able to represent multiple views. The position could be held by a single chair or by co-chairs (such as one district representative and one teacher representative).

Step 4. Allow adequate time for planning and decision making.

During the planning and decision-making process, the committee will need to do the following:

- Select the type of compensation program to be implemented.
 - Will the compensation program consider only student achievement data? Or will it include multiple measures, such as educator knowledge and skills, position assignment, added professional responsibility, and/or student learning results?
 - Will the compensation program be voluntary or mandatory?
 - Will the compensation program apply to all staff or only to classroom teachers?
- Consider the following six important principles in developing any type of pay plan. The program should be:
 - Based on objective criteria
 - Understandable
 - Attainable
 - Doable
 - Affordable
 - Sustainable

- Establish a timeline for implementation and assessment.
- Develop a working knowledge of pay-for-performance options and experiences in other districts and states.

Step 5. Build support for the work and, eventually, the compensation program.

Communication is an essential tool for accomplishing change. However, communication experts have noted the adverse effects of ineffective communication strategies because "communication is often used poorly or thoughtlessly" (D'Aprix, 1996, p. 7). Deep and broad changes—such as the implementation of alternative educator compensation systems—require comprehensive and persistent effective and strategic communication.

Varied communication methods can include the following:

Written materials, such as brochures, letters, and fact sheets.

- Meetings that allow face-to-face communication and an equal exchange of information sharing.
- Electronic communication, such as e-mail and websites.

For effective communication, the following actions are essential:

- Choose language carefully.
- Give the plan a name and an identity.
- Anticipate the critics and skeptics.
- Communicate with the media.

Step 6. Prepare for the payout.

- Decide how (and how much) information will be released to the press and the public.
- Be fully prepared to explain—in nontechnical terms—how rewards were determined.

Step 7. Develop a feedback loop to make midcourse corrections.

Obtaining feedback from all stakeholders throughout the process is essential in determining program success, stakeholder satisfaction, and public perception. This goal can be achieved in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Commissioning a formal evaluation of the program by a neutral third party.
- Hosting focus group meetings.
- Collecting satisfaction surveys.

References

Community Training and Assistance Center. (2004). *Catalyst for change: Pay for performance in Denver* (Final Report). Boston: Author. Retrieved July 12, 2007, from <http://www.ctacusa.com/denver-vol3-final.pdf>

D'Aprix, R. M. (1996). *Communicating for change: Connecting the workplace with the marketplace*. Somerset, NJ: Wiley.

The information contained in this article was excerpted from a "how to" guide soon to be released by the Center for Educator Compensation Reform.

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The Center for Educator Compensation Reform (CECR) was awarded to Westat—in partnership with Learning Point Associates, Synergy Enterprises Inc., Vanderbilt University, and the University of Wisconsin—by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2006.

The primary purpose of CECR is to support the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees with their implementation efforts through the provision of ongoing technical assistance and the development and dissemination of timely resources. CECR also is charged with raising national awareness of alternative and effective strategies for educator compensation through this newsletter, a Web-based clearinghouse, and other outreach activities. We look forward to an exciting partnership with the TIF grantees as we embark together on blazing a new path for education reform.

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